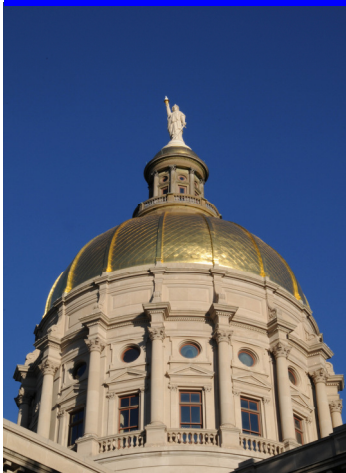


# Upper Chamber Report

Raegan Weber, Press Director  
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## TOP STORY

### Legislative Day 25: Senate Hears State of Judicial System

By Natalie Strong

CHAMBER (March 16, 2010) Sen. Don Thomas (R-Dalton) welcomed the Rev. Danny Cochran, senior pastor of Holly Creek Baptist Church, to serve as the Chaplain of the Day. Cochran's message encouraged senators to lead our state in the right direction and lean strongly on their faith.

Following the introduction of the Chaplain of the Day, the Senate moved into a joint meeting with the House of Representatives for the State of the Judiciary address, given by the honorable Chief Justice Carol Hunstein of Georgia's Supreme Court. She emphasized that the Georgia Judicial System is vital to all Georgians' safety, but the court systems are on the edge of an abyss. Hunstein outlined the court systems in Georgia and noted that members of the judicial system provide the utmost in public service and justice for all Georgians. She stressed that tough economic times are causing increased case loads and decreased funding. The Georgia Judicial System is a significant source of revenue for the state and local communities with \$500 million in court fees being collected and nearly \$90 million of that revenue being returned to the state general fund. However, Hunstein stressed this revenue will decrease as core court functions are reduced and it will become increasingly difficult to fulfill their constitutional duty with budget cuts. She noted that the need for justice does not shrink in a diminishing economy. Even one of Georgia's largest court systems, the Fulton County Courts, will face the surreal prospect of having to close their doors on certain days of the month. Hunstein concluded by urging the legislators to protect Georgia's Judicial System. "We share a common mission: to serve the people of Georgia, public service, and provide our citizens with the best possible government."



Chief Justice Carol Hunstein

After the joint session concluded, the Senate reconvened to take care of the four pieces of legislation on the day's calendar. Sen. Jim Butterworth's (R-Clarksville) Rules of the Road Bill (SB 345) allows for races on county and municipal roads when sanctioned by the local governing authority and when the road is closed to traffic. Two amendments were added that require medical personnel to be present during the road races and a public notification announcing the race to be published in the local news at least 30 days prior to the event. Butterworth noted that this is a great economic development bill and cited that cities such as Detroit and Miami already allow for these sanctioned street races. Both amendments were adopted

*Continued on Page 2*

*\* Follow the State Senate on Twitter at GASenatePress*

and the Rules of the Road Bill passed by 41 to 9.

The next three bills all received unanimous support from the Senate and will move to the House for consideration. SB 387, presented by Sen. Dan Weber (R-Dunwoody), provides career counseling and advisement for students in grades 6 through 12. This bill is a vital step for Georgia to qualify for specific federal funding to aid its financially struggling school systems. SB 392, a response to a bus crash that injured Morehouse students, will require educational institutions to verify that motorized transportation of students are properly licensed and certified. The bus company must furnish mandatory forms and insurance paperwork before they are cleared to transport students.



Sen. Jeff Mullis presents his Blue Alert Bill to the Senate

Sen. Jack Murphy (R-Cumming), the author of the bill, stressed that “we must not cut corners and endanger students when trying to save pennies during tough economic times.”

Finally, Sen. Jeff Mullis’ (R-Chickamauga) Blue Alert system Bill (SB 397) passed unanimously, which creates a statewide system to speed the apprehension of violent criminals who have injured or killed local, state, and federal law enforcement officers. For more information on Blue Alert, see Page 3. □

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## Sen. Fort Stands with Students to Reject Higher Education Budget Cuts

By Jennifer Kitt



**ATLANTA** (March 16, 2010) – Sen. Vincent Fort (D-Atlanta) joined 500 Georgia college students during a rally at the State Capitol today to protest higher education budget cuts. Students encouraged legislators to stop cuts to college programs, and end tuition increases.

“When we cut higher education in this way, we are taking away the American Dream from our young people,” said Fort.

Fort has been a champion for issues concerning education, and currently serves on the Senate Education and Youth Committee. He has also drafted legislation (Senate Bill 132) that will increase the high school drop out age from 16 to 17. □

“Higher education is the last place where funding should be cut. These students are the future leaders of Georgia, and they deserve a quality college experience,” said Fort. “Georgia will not progress unless we invest in educating our students.”

In addition to apprehensions about increased tuition, students also voiced their concerns about the elimination of curriculum programs. Fort opposes this budget cutting method, and feels students should have the opportunity to learn about a variety of subjects.



## Mullis: Blue Alert Passes the Senate

By Raegan Weber



ATLANTA (March 16, 2010) – Sen. Jeff Mullis (R-Chickamauga), chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee, made the following statement today following the Senate’s vote on his Blue Alert System Bill – SB 397:

“Georgia’s law enforcement personnel are our first line of defense when it comes to public safety. When a peace officer is injured or killed, we must do all we can to apprehend the criminal immediately. I commend my Senate colleagues for unanimously passing Senate Bill 397 to protect our law enforcement and our communities. Had this sort of system been in place when Officer Vogt was shot and killed, his shooter could have been apprehended quickly,” said Mullis.

Mullis carried SB 397 on behalf of the Georgia Fraternal Order of Police. The bill creates a state-wide alert system to speed the apprehension of violent criminals who kill or seriously injure local, state, or federal law enforcement officers. The State Blue Alert System has four criteria that must be met to be activated:

1. A law enforcement officer must have been killed or seriously injured or seriously injured by an offender
2. The investigating law enforcement agency must determine that the offender poses a serious risk or threat to the public and other law enforcement personnel
3. A detailed description of the offender’s vehicle, vehicle tag, or partial tag must be available for broadcast to the public
4. The investigating law enforcement agency of jurisdiction must recommend activation of the Blue Alert to the State Operations

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## Sen. Ramsey Hosts Georgia African American Horse Council



By Katie Wright

ATLANTA (March 16, 2010) – Sen. Ronald Ramsey (D-Decatur) recently hosted the Georgia African American Horse Council at the State Capitol. Twenty-three elite cowboys and cowgirls visited the Capitol to observe the legislative process first hand and to be recognized in the Senate chamber.

“These cowboys and cowgirls play an important role in our community and in promoting the horse industry in Georgia,” said Ramsey. “It is an honor to host such a distinguished group at the State Capitol.”

The Georgia African American Horse Council is comprised of cowboys and cowgirls that compete in professional rodeos. They offer free youth programs, scholarships, riding lessons and many other services to the community.



## Senate Transportation Committee Limits Terms for DOT Board Members

By Raegan Weber

CAP 125 (March 16, 2010) – Georgia Department of Transportation Board Members will have shorter term limits and will be directed to be more responsive to Senate and House legislators under a bill by Transportation Committee Chairman Jeff Mullis (R-Chickamauga). Mullis' bill, Senate Bill 448, passed the Senate Transportation Committee with a unanimous vote after two meetings of deliberations.

The original proposal began with limiting DOT Board terms to two years. While many members of the committee agreed that Board members need to be more responsive to the legislators and terms should be updated, they felt two-year terms coinciding with legislative terms was not long enough. Mullis was willing to compromise, but reminded the committee that the only mechanism to remove board members was impeachment. By limiting their terms, they would have to be re-elected by the legislators.

During the process, Mullis noted the bill as "the committee's bill" due to his desire for each committee member's input. A compromise was reached and SB 448 now limits DOT Board Members to four-year terms. Sen. Chip Pearson (R-Dawsonville) added a provision to the bill to require yearly meetings called

jointly by the chairpersons of the House and Senate Transportation Committees. Each member must be available to discuss with the legislators that elected them any matters that may be of interest to the members of the legislative delegation.

This enabling legislation is effective on January 1, 2011, but only upon ratification of Senate Resolution 1126 by the voters of Georgia on the November 2010 ballot. SR 1126 unanimously passed out of the Transportation Committee in a previous hearing.

Sen. Valencia Seay (D-Riverdale) introduced a resolution urging the United States Congress to assist Georgia by continuing federal funding of public transportation for elderly and disabled Georgians (SR 1159). Many elderly and disabled Georgians rely on Clayton County's C-TRAN bus system to go to work, go to the doctor and even get the medications they may need. C-TRAN is expected to be shut down at the end of March due to funding cuts. The resolution passed unanimously.

SB 51 sponsored by Sen. Doug Stoner (D-Smyrna), which gives greater authorities to the Georgia Rail Passenger Authority, also received unanimous passage by the committee. □

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## Buckle up:

### *Sen. Don Thomas' Seat Belt Legislation Speeds through Public Safety Committee*

By Natalie Strong

CLOB 307 (March 16, 2010) - With 100% support, Sen. Don Thomas' (R-Dalton) Seat Belt Legislation (SB 458) was voted out of the Public Safety Committee and now awaits its turn on the Senate Floor. Thomas has worked to ensure that Georgians are safe and responsible when operating or riding in all motor vehicles. The bill will still allow for the exclusion of the agriculture community, but now pick-up truck drivers in Georgia are one step closer to being required to buckle up. Representatives from the Georgia Junior League, Governor's Office of Highway Safety, and Children's Healthcare of Atlanta were all on hand to applaud Thomas' efforts. Thomas reminded the committee that over \$25 million in Medicaid costs has been lost in the past 10 years from preventable injuries and death caused by accidents where a pick-up driver was not wearing a seat belt. He stressed that the pick-up truck loophole must be closed in order to receive millions of dollars in federal aid available to other states. □



## Health and Human Services Committee Votes to stop the Sale of Synthetic Marijuana

By Jennifer Kitt



CAP 450 (March 16, 2010) - The Health and Human Services Committee showed their commitment to ending substance abuse by unanimously passing Sen. Ed Harbison's legislation to end the legal sale of synthetic marijuana in Georgia stores. Senate Bill 498 would also add the substances to Schedule 1 on the controlled substance list; substances on this list carry the most severe penalties. Harbison was inspired to create the legislation after Atlanta area teens were hospitalized after using the drug.

The committee also unanimously passed two amendments by Chairman Don Thomas (R-Dalton), the first of which urges the Georgia Composite Medical Board to establish regulations on office-based surgeries and anesthesia. Sen. Greg Goggans (R-Douglas) offered an amendment to the resolution to encompass all health care providers who are licensed by a composite medical board, which will include oral surgeons and dentists. Dr. Steve Sween from the Georgia Society of Anesthesiologists spoke in favor of Senate Resolution 1222.

Thomas' second resolution (SR 1162) creates a study committee that will examine traumatic brain injuries (TBI) in Georgia and how to amend the State Health Plan to include TBI facilities. □

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## Reduction in Continuing Education Requirements on the Horizon for State Teachers

By Adam Sweat

CLOB 307 (March 16, 2010) – Every five years, teachers are required to complete ten professional learning units (PLUs), which is equal to 100 hours. In light of the budget crisis local school systems continue to face, senators are taking steps to substantially reduce the number of PLUs required by teachers. Senate Resolution 1199, sponsored by Sen. Lee Hawkins (R-Gainesville), will mandate the Professional Standards Committee cut the required number of PLUs in half for the next five years. Therefore, teachers will now be required to receive only five PLUs, which is equal to 50 hours, in the next five years. Hawkins explained this would only last five years and would be re-examined at the end of the allotted time period. After unanimous passage of the vote, the bill now moves on to the Senate Rules Committee.



Sen. Ronald Ramsey (D-Lithonia) presented Senate Bill 420, concerning Perfect Attendance Awards. The bill would establish a new provision stating if a student misses school due to illness or injury from a statewide state of emergency or epidemic, the absence will not count against a student's candidacy for the Perfect Attendance Award. Ramsey spoke about a family in his district with several children who received this award for each grade, K-12. However, when their youngest child became sick with swine flu, she was not eligible for the award. This bill received a unanimous vote from the committee.

Chairman Dan Weber (R-Dunwoody) presented SB 457, establishing additional alternative procedures for converting a high school to a charter school within a high school cluster. A cluster is determined by geographical boundaries where there are elementary, middle, and high schools. SB 457 would allow a charter school to be established within a high school cluster if it is approved by those living within the cluster. It passed out of committee with a 9-1 vote. Sen. Vincent Fort (D-Atlanta) was the only member who expressed opposition. □

## Budget Task Force Presents Final Recommendations to Lt. Governor Cagle and Senate Leadership

By Jaillene Hunter

(Atlanta, GA) – Today, the Budget Task Force presented Lt. Governor Casey Cagle a final report outlining 50 recommendations focusing on long-term budget solutions. If all recommendations were fully implemented, the projected cost savings would total over \$3 billion. The group was tasked with identifying new ways to cut state spending without drastic cuts to essential services or raising taxes in this economy.

“As we face some extremely difficult budget decisions this session, we want to make the fiscally responsible decisions now that will position our state for economic growth and job creation. We need to think toward the future and implement systemic reforms that will change the way we operate and prevent another shortfall this significant. It is vital that we maintain our AAA Bond Rating, which is a ‘good house-keeping’ seal of approval on the fiscal strength of our state,” said Lt. Governor Casey Cagle. “None of the recommendations are quick fixes and I look forward to studying each of the proposals, along with the Senate, to determine which make the most sense for Georgia. I want to express my appreciation to each member of the Task Force for the considerable effort and time given to advance fundamental reform in state government with a fiscally conservative and business-minded approach.”



“It is clear that our state leaders are proactively looking for ways to confront the budget challenges our state faces with the future in mind. We focused our efforts on areas where we could bring real-world value of new efficiencies, consolidation, and seizing opportunities even under difficult conditions, just as private sector businesses are doing everyday in this economy. This exercise proved beneficial for all participants and we are hopeful that some of these recommendations will provide the structural changes necessary to put Georgia on the right trajectory for the future,” said Ed Heys, Atlanta Deputy Managing Partner of Deloitte& Touche.

After cutting over \$2 billion from the state budget in the 2009 session and still faced with an additional \$1.5 billion shortfall, Cagle, along with Senate leadership, announced early in the legislative session the formation of a Budget Task Force. The Budget Task Force brought together experienced business leaders and accounting professionals who held a total of 7 meetings and participated in extensive work sessions.

While some of the 50 specific recommendations can impact the state budget this year, the majority of the recommendations are focused on long-term budget solutions including consolidation and streamlining of state services and greater efficiencies. For example, the Task Force recommends the state increase shared services, particularly in human resources, payroll, accounting, and classroom curriculum development. Industry standards for human resources personnel to employees are 1:195 but the state operates at 1:115 and smaller state agencies operate at 1:88.

□

# Legislative Process Dates

## Important Dates in the Legislative Process

**Introduction** - Last day to file and/or 1st Read in Senate.

**30<sup>th</sup> day** - last day to introduce General Senate bills and resolutions (even year). [Rule 3-1.2 (b)]

**30<sup>th</sup> day** - last day to accept General House bills and resolutions. [Rule 3-1.2 (b)]

**39<sup>th</sup> day** - last day to introduce General Senate bills and resolutions (odd year). [Rule 3-1.2 (b)]

*\*Note: Senate bills and resolutions must be filed with the Secretary before 4:00 p.m. to be 1st read on the next legislative day.*

## Deadlines for passage in current year

**Committee Report Deadlines** - Last day to read report. Report submitted to Secretary by convening.

**28<sup>th</sup> day** - General Senate bills and resolutions.

**38<sup>th</sup> day** - Local Senate bills and resolutions.

**38<sup>th</sup> day** - General House bills and resolutions.

**40<sup>th</sup> day** - Local House bills and resolutions.

### **Calendar Management**

Calendar in numerical order after 2nd reading of legislation; days 1-5. [Rule 4-2.10 (a)]

Rules Committee sets the calendar for days 6 - 40. [Rule 4-2.10 (b)]

### **General Senate Bills and Resolutions**

**26<sup>th</sup> day** - File with Secretary of the Senate. [Rule 3-1.2 (a)]

**27<sup>th</sup> day** - 1st Reading and referral to committee. [Rule 3-1.2 (b)]

**28<sup>th</sup> day** - Committee report read upon convening. (A recommitted bill already 2nd read - report day 29.)

**29<sup>th</sup> day** - 2nd Reading. [Rule 4-2.6]

**30<sup>th</sup> day** - Passage [Rule 4-2.10 (a)] and immediate transmittal to House. [Rule 4-2.14]

### **Local Senate Bills and Resolutions**

**35<sup>th</sup> day** - File with Secretary of the Senate. [3-1.2 (a)]

**36<sup>th</sup> day** - 1st Reading and referral to committee. (Cannot pass for 2 days.) [Rule 4-2.4 (c) ]

**38<sup>th</sup> day** - Favorable report by committee, passage and immediate transmittal to the House. [Rule 4-2.14]

**39<sup>th</sup> day** - 2nd Reading in House.

**40<sup>th</sup> day** - Favorable report and passage in House.

### **General House Bills and Resolutions**

**30<sup>th</sup> day** - Transmitted from House and received by Secretary.

**31<sup>st</sup> day** - 1st Reading and referral to committee. [Rule 3-1.2 (b)]

**38<sup>th</sup> day** - Favorable report upon convening and 2nd reading. (Applies to days 36 - 38) [Rule 4-2.6]

**39<sup>th</sup> day** - Passage. [Rule 4-2.10 (a)]

**40<sup>th</sup> day** - Passage of bills or resolutions tabled day 39; removed from the table on day 40. [Rule 4-2.10 (a)]

### **Local House Bills and Resolutions**

**39<sup>th</sup> day** - 1<sup>st</sup> Reading and referral to committee.

**40<sup>th</sup> day** - Favorable report by committee and passage.

*\* Note: On the 30th day and on the last three days of session, bills and resolutions needing action from the House are automatically immediately transmitted. [Rule 4-2.14]*

**40<sup>th</sup> day** - Passage of bills or resolutions tabled day 39; removed from the table on day 40. [Rule 4-2.10 (a)]